



## Office of the Attorney General

State of Texas

July 6, 1998

DAN MORALES

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ms. Lan P. Nguyen  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston  
Legal Department  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR98-1583

Dear Ms. Nguyen:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Open Records Act (the "act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 116411.

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for "copies from the City's files and records of all papers and other things," concerning residential use deed restrictions for a specified property. In response to the request, you submit to this office for review the document which you assert is responsive. You state that a "significant portion of the requested information" will be released to the requestor. However, you claim that the submitted document is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.103(a) of the Government Code reads as follows:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information:

- (1) relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature or settlement negotiations, to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party; and
- (2) that the attorney general or the attorney of the political subdivision has determined should be withheld from public inspection.

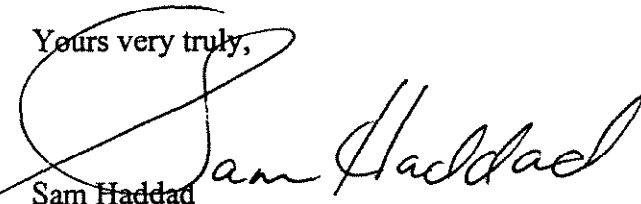
....

To secure the protection of section 552.103(a), a governmental body must demonstrate that requested information "relates" to a pending or reasonably anticipated judicial or quasi-judicial proceeding. Open Records Decision No. 588 (1991). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the applicability of an exception in a particular situation. The test for establishing that section 552.103 applies is a two-prong showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.). Litigation cannot be regarded as "reasonably anticipated" unless there is concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture. Open Records Decision Nos. 452 (1986), 331 (1982), 328 (1982). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision Nos. 452 (1986), 350 (1982).

You state the city sent out a compliance request letter to the property owner, however, "[d]ue to failure of compliance within the time designated in the notice letter, the City anticipates the filing of a lawsuit against the property owner if the violation is not abated, as provided by section 10-553 of the City Code of Ordinances and authorized by Chapters 230 and 54 of the Texas Local Government Code." In this instance, you have made the requisite showing that the requested information relates to anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Therefore, the submitted document may be withheld under section 552.103.<sup>1</sup>

We are resolving this matter with this informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and may not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,

  
Sam Haddad  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SH/mjc

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<sup>1</sup>If the opposing party in the litigation has seen or had access to any of the information in these records, there would be no justification for now withholding that information from the requestor pursuant to section 552.103(a). Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). In addition, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation is concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

Ref.: ID# 116411

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Dennis J. Albright  
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(w/o enclosures)